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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 RIYADH 000651

SIPDIS
NOFORN

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP (JHARRIS), R (MARK DAVIDSON), NEA/PPD (WALTER DOUGLAS)

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TAGS PGOV, PHUM, PTER, ECON KISL, SA
SUBJECT: IDEOLOGICAL AND OWNERSHIP TRENDS IN THE SAUDI MEDIA

Classified By: CDA David Rundell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

1. (S) Summary: The Saudi regulatory system offers the al-Saud regime a means to manipulate the nation's print media to promote its own agenda. In interviews with Embassy and Consulate Jeddah officers before the early December Eid holiday, XXXXXXXXXXXX editors and XXXXXXXXXXXX TV man //Family Business?//
13. (S) Embassy press officers met recently XXXXXXXXXXXX. According to Shuaa Capital, a Gulf-based financial services firm, SRMG is the largest
14. (S) According to XXXXXXXXXXXX, Prince Waleed bin Talal, he told us, now owns 35% of SMRG, with "private investors" controlling the rest. F
15. (S/NF) It is worth noting, however, that other Saudi editors we've spoken to always refer to the Saudi Research and Marketing Group as beir //New Direction//
16. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXX is representative of a trend we have noted in all media here: the increase of well-educated, relatively pro-US Saudis in ec
17. (SBU) Although originally founded as an economic daily, "Al Eqtisadiyah" has long been equally known for its political content, often printi RIYADH 00000651 002 OF 004
//The MBC Group//
18. (S) A similar ideological and ownership pattern characterizes the hugely-successful Middle East Broadcasting (MBC) group, according to XXXX
19. (S/NF) During a visit to the US Embassy in November for a visa in preparation for the King's UNGA and White House summit meetings, XXXXXXXX
10. (S/NF) In a meeting at his XXXXXXXXXXXX office XXXXXXXXXXXX with Consulate and Embassy press officers, XXXXXXXXXXXX because of the SAG's
//David Letterman, Agent of Influence//
11. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXX said the American programming on channels 4 and 5 were proving the most popular among Saudis. A look at the December 17 f
12. (S) Over coffee in a Jeddah Starbucks, XXXXXXXXXXXX, and XXXXXXXXXXXX elaborated on the changes in the Saudi media environment. "The gover
13. (S) So effective has US programming been, said XXXXXXXXXXXX, that it is widely assumed that the USG must be behind it. Some believe, he sa
14. (S) While revenue from commercials on Rotana's Fox Movie Channel probably matter more to Prince Waleed than the dissemination of western i wasn't assaulting the husband and child.) These films and others broadcast over the Eid offer models of supportive behavior in relationships, a
15. (C) Saudi-produced religious programming on ART and Rotana also departs from past models. Rotana's popular religious channel "Al Risala" f //The Idol//
16. (S) The Kingdom's chattering classes aren't the only ones noticing the movement towards moderation and rapprochement with the outside worl
17. (S) Extremist elements, said all of these contacts, have been largely deprived of their public voice in the media and on television, but r
//Okaz//
18. (S) In a meeting with Jeddah CG and XXXXXXXXXXXX, XXXXXXXXXXXX was blunt when asked about SAG efforts in countering extremist thinking. "F
19. (S) XXXXXXXXXXXX also told us that he had taken over the XXXXXXXXXXXX establishment only two months ago at the direction of the Minister c
//The Stick//
20. (S/NF) Although all chief editor positions in Saudi Arabia must RIYADH 00000651 004 OF 004
be approved by the Minister of Information, it is the job of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to take action against editors and writers who refu
21. (S/NF) According to our contacts, however, a more effective system is in place. Instead of being fired or seeing their publications shut c
//Al-Hayat and Khaled bin Sultan//
22. (S/NF) One of the exceptions to the talking-point consistency of most Saudi media is pan-Arab daily "Al-Hayat," which is owned by Deputy I
23. (S/NF) When this rather more dynamic editorial environment at "Al-Hayat" was noted to XXXXXXXXXXXX he told us that Khaled bin-Sultan actua
24. (S) Comment: In keeping with other initiatives such as the Interfaith Dialogue and plans for educational reform, the SAG has clearly made
Rundell